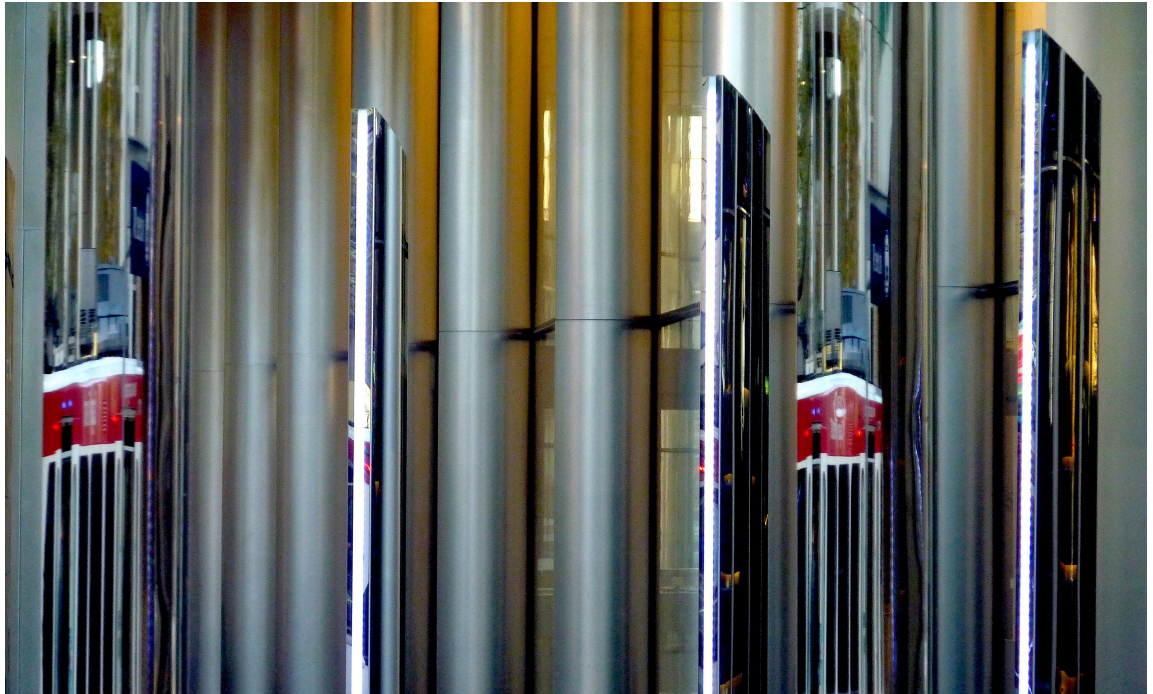


Lesley Battler | Journal | 1999



Journal archive project

Introduction

As a young reader i was fascinated by diaries, journals, notebooks of all kinds. Perhaps part of that attraction was that they seemed a way of telling your own story, remaking the world as you went on. “They” never have the final say in your journal.

I grew up in a family that was shattered by mental illness and writing in a journal was a discipline and a way of keeping myself together; proof I could build an independent life. I was never big on recording my most intimate feelings or expressing myself. For me, the journal existed to help me let go and move beyond the emotional, interior world. I was so much more interested in recording the flora and fauna of the mundane. Daily life was exotic to me.

From the 1980s and on into the Naughts, I wrote in a journal, which I eventually transcribed into electronic format as a project to keep me occupied during the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown. At first it felt like a self-indulgent pastime, certainly a little irrelevant considering world-events, but as I continued I started feeling maybe there was some value to the project. I decided to preserve them as archives, format them as PDFs and release them onto the Internet where anyone can search, download and use any of the material for projects of their own.

To me, this journal is really an archive, portrait of an era as seen by one insignificant person. It's the insignificance that is truly key here. I love the archives and records of the invisible lives that accumulate into social zeitgeists. Being a journal, it's hit-and-miss what I wrote about, or had time to write about. Huge chunks of my life never made it to the page while there may be hundreds of words devoted to a movie I enjoyed on a hot summer night. I have not added any narrative arc or changed names to keep the journal as intact as possible.

In such a long time span the journal volumes reveal a generation trying to find their way in the world; me and so many of my friends and acquaintances working contract jobs, going to community colleges to learn vocational skills. Spoiler alert: societal change, turbulence, employment issues, generational conflict were just as strong then as they are now. While transcribing the journals I also became fascinated by the rhythm of daily life, how periods of calm so often erupt into times of intense change.

I have taken the original journals and reformatted them into chronological years that begin in January and end in December, and I have included a synopsis with each one to provide a little context. I preserved as much as possible the style and quirks of the original handwritten journals and only employed some light editing to correct place names, and obvious mis-spellings.

These volumes are meant for anyone who is interested in the 1980s and 1990s, in archives, in the lives of young people trying to find a place in the world, in personal impressions of socio-economic-cultural events. This, of course, includes the introduction of the Internet to our daily lives. Please feel free to browse, reuse, recycle any of this material for your own projects. After all this time I still believe information wants to be free.

Vol. 19, 1999

Business trip to the Okanagan – A precarious position at work – Writers Company – Petting the poodle and other turf wars – Employment Equity roadshow at the Ogden Shops office – “The CPR can go to hell” – Swiss Guides festival in Golden, BC – Edelweiss Village and monkey cages – Fin du Monde picnic – The customs and mores of casino life – Sgt Pepper – Road trip from Calgary to Montréal – the Geographic Centre of North American – In the witness protection program at La Révolution B&B – An Eaton’s catalogue house – Driving a locomotive on Lethbridge’s High Level trestle bridge – New reorganization chart.

Jan. 15

Looks like another business trip in the future. This time shorter than the others. Last week I was at the Cannery Row bar with Ralph and Ian La Cuvée. Ralph was giving me one of his fake assignments: go to the Goderich-Exeter shortline on a two week practicum and write about it. Sounded great but the company wouldn't pay for it – or sanction it. But Ian persuaded Ralph to send me on a real trip to Vernon (BC) with him and Debbie-Lyne Guerin to attend the ceremony for the transfer of the Ottawa Valley Railway from CPR to OmniTrax. Ralph became paranoid, though, and kept telling Ian he was conspiring against him and wanted to take over the department and the company.

Ralph led us to the Capital. He tried to talk us into going with him to Buzzards, but Ian and I called it an evening. Ralph proceeded down the street and Ian told me Ralph is a brilliant man with a lot of problems. But he cares for his staff and sticks up for all of us. Ian also said Ralph is the best boss he ever had, and assured me Ralph considers me a valuable part of the group.

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Paul Clark, new VP of Government and Public Affairs, fired Ralph. I believe it's because of embezzlement or mishandling of the departmental budget. Hard to cut through all of the rumours.

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Flight from Calgary to Kelowna. Brief, beautiful, turbulent. Touched down at the small airport in Kelowna. A beautiful day, +6 degrees, sun. Couldn't think of anything I'd rather do on a day like this than explore the Okanagan.

Interesting blend of the west and the Southern Ontario fruit belt. Took a taxi to the Greyhound bus station to catch my connection to Vernon. The destination names blew me away. Prince Rupert, Prince George, Vancouver. Boarding the bus made me feel twenty years younger. Familiar bus smell. I took the taxi driver's advice and settled on the right side to get the best view.

Drive along the coast. On the right, mountains, river. To the left, bluffs, orchards, branches tangled like wire. Small peeling houses, a junkyard. A little like Highway 2, only with mountains. These mountains, unlike the ones on the way to Banff, have a dreamy quality. Always another curve in the road. Vernon appeared, on a lake nestled between mountains. After arriving at the terminal I taxied to the Prestige Inn. Mountains veiled in cloud. The taxi driver asked me what I was doing in Vernon. I said I was here to write about the CPR-OVR ceremony. He smiled and said, "Ah! The Okanagan Valley Railway!" He wanted to hear all about what I do at CPR.

Checked in at the Prestige. Ian arrived. He was almost stranded in Dorval, caught in another of the horrendous ice storms back east. Spent the rest of the afternoon in Debbie-Lyne's room preparing for the event, cutting name tags, tying ribbons around the gifts, last-minute busywork. Dinner and copious drinks, including vodka martinis, in the hotel restaurant. We talked about Ralph, how he hired the three of us, how much we will miss him and how things will change. We then went out on the town and played video games until everything closed. The event next morning went very well though, in spite of hangovers. I have no idea what will happen to me with Ralph gone.

Nov. 6

Sheri, June Carr and I went on to take a writing workshop with Aritha van Herk at the U of C. It is an academic course and it feels as if I have been out of that world for a very long time. In a big about-face, Rosemary Nixon called me at work and urged me to take Aritha's class. I thought it might be a good idea to take my mind off the turmoil at work so I was accepted even though I applied late. I was very curious about Aritha as Rosemary had set her up as a totemic figure, almost some sort of deity and was expecting an Amazon of a woman dressed in bear skins.

She is actually a small woman but has great presence, a real charisma that makes people look up to her. Very well-dressed, chic even. Her eyes are pale, widely spaced and powerful, they can make her seem intimidating. They can make her look intense, angry, even predatory sometimes. Occasionally thunderclouds presaging a tirade. She uses this power to great effect in the class, staring people into submission.

Aritha is the grande dame of Alberta writers and likes to make people believe she's outrageous. She has a strange way of reading stories, pulls out quirky tangents. She often harangues the class, calls us ignoramuses, assumes we don't (or can't) read or know anything about culture because we can't unglue ourselves from the TV. At this age I find her performances entertaining and am enjoying the classes immensely, but I know some of the younger people are genuinely offended and June Carr hates her. I find her interesting and full of energy, and so is the class. A much different experience from Concordia. She also seems to like my writing and her comments have been quite positive.

Went out after class with Nancy Ginzer, Sheri and Susanne Smith. We all griped about Aritha. Sheri has been getting Cs and isn't happy, said she's never got a C in her life. I was shocked to find out Nancy has been getting Cs. Nancy's probably the best writer in the class and she is outraged over the way Aritha is treating her.

March 24

Bill Fric called me at work. He's still going strong with his writing and has begun another course at Mount Royal. He wants me to send him some of my writing. We talked a bit, as much as I could in a cubicle. I told him a little about the new round of lay-offs at CPR, my boss being fired and how vulnerable I was feeling right now. Not just vulnerable. Angry as well. Transfer all these people to Calgary and then start in on more lay-offs?!! Bill said, "Surely they wouldn't touch you." He also said he finds it hard finding fiction he really likes but my writing never lets him down. I was so happy for this encouraging phone call.

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Writers Company meeting at Wendy Adams's house. Our group is becoming smaller all the time. June Carr and Michael Cranley quit. Sheri picked me up outside GCS and drove me to Wendy's. Out of town in the northwest. I like Sheri more and more all the time. She's different from the "cool customer" I saw in Rosemary's class. She has pale eyes and I found her distant, enigmatic even. An observer. Her writing was always very down-to-earth, though. She is a corporate lawyer and has been a lobbyist for the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers for nine years. She has an ease with success and the corporate world I envy. Most of all I've come to love her sense of humour. She's from small-town Alberta, Claresholm, and has an earthy folksy humour.

Good talk on the way to Wendy's. She said her marriage had come to an end but her husband, Paul, wouldn't be the one to make the final break although he lost interest in her and in the marriage. Sheri tried holding on for too long but eventually had to end it. She said she went for counselling for three months in the GCS building and gave me the name of the psychologist, in case I need one. I was almost disappointed when we reached Wendy's house. Her husband is VP of a computer firm and they live in a standard executive house in a brand new subdivision, settler territory, in a Martian landscape of bronze hills. Small group tonight, Wendy, Sheri, Maureen and me, but we had a good meeting.

Another good talk with Sheri on the way back. She's seriously thinking of selling her house, taking the money, investing it and writing full-time. We talked about work, identity and ego. She said when she went to the Sage Hills writers' retreat she cried all night because she had quit her job and was no longer a lawyer, but felt she wasn't a good enough writer to call herself that. We talked about competition and what it feels like to be confronted by that side of your personality. It was so good to be able to talk about that with someone. "Ohmigod," she said, "I never realized I could be such a bitch." Sheri said she doesn't want to go back to work, she's much happier now seeing the people she wants, instead of it always being part of the job, staying in the network.

March 25

Email from Sheri saying how much she enjoys our discussions in the car and thinks we have a lot in common. A nice uplifting message especially considering how Ralph's abrupt departure coupled with another round of lay-offs has turned the office into a snake pit. I can't believe how naïve I was back in the BIS days. Beer at the Capital with Isabel. Isabel informed me that Carol is yet another person going after Ralph's job. Isabel said she is "playing the game" and "petting the poodle" by suggesting that she and Carol can write, edit and work with clients to produce communications products and strategies. Ummm ... that is my job, the one I created from nothing, enabled by Peta. I swear I felt my body temperature drop ten degrees. Isabel could feel it too.

I hope Paul Clark will do as predicted and bring in an outsider and put an end to these internal turf wars, everyone sidling around each other wondering who is bucking for what, who has Clark's ear, etc. Right now we all seem to be simultaneously friends and rivals. I'm glad Isabel told me this so I at least know up front what they are up to. Unsurprisingly, Dave Jones is also vying for Ralph's position and he has at least worked in the department for a long time and wins awards. It's amusing to see how managerial he's acting now. So how do I keep myself from falling into this vortex of office politics – and how do I keep people from stealing my job?

March 29

Aritha couldn't be at class tonight. Instead, she had Alberto Manguel come in to speak to us. Portly with a neat silver beard, not one glimmer of eye contact, academic to the power of 10. He didn't so much speak to us as at us, kept laughing at his own little erudite jokes. I ended up looking at some notes I had made while wandering along Stephen Avenue and vicinity.

- CIBC building, arched window, tall window panes, Greek symmetry. Across the street, the concrete Scotia Bank, dome of the Alberta Treasury.
- Currencies International, red and gold.
- Flick your eyes from the Bargain Shop! to the Palace Theatre, cover charge and dress code in effect. Up the street, King Henry VIII in a box.

- Opera pours out the throat of Verdi’s Casa de la Salsa.
- Lammle’s Western Wear in the Leeson and Linehan Block.
- Statue of two fervent businessmen outside the Bay trying to persuade, or sell something, to each other. Eternal wheeling and dealing.
- The street roughens. Empty storefront, masking tape Xs the windows, sheets of plastic billowing in the wind.
- Turn down the alley just behind Stephen Ave. Letters fading into brick. Willman International. Charred brick sunken in jungle-growth graffiti. Snake pit of overhead wires.
- Ark’s Pawnshop. “Don’t Sell it – Pawn it! Jewelry, diamonds, TVs, VCRs. We pawn everything. \$\$\$ Cash. Private parking.”
- Bold black geometry of fire escapes, steps fleeing down the backsides of buildings.
- Textures. Worn brick, grilled windows.
- A crane revolves over the rooftops. Reflections of the Calgary Tower waver along the glass surface behind Ark’s pawnshop.
- “Absolutely No Parking Any Time” sign in a smeared window. Graffiti over top of the sign says, “You suck.”
- Wind moans through the ribcage of new construction near the Glenbow.
- Merchant House Antiques juxtaposed with Boodlum, Union Jack sign, Harry’s News.
- The Bank of Nova Scotia, now Teatro restaurant stands impenetrable as the Bastille.
- The James Joyce Pub in the former Bank of Toronto building. Beside it a red and gold Matryosha doll advertises the Kalinka Restaurant and Bar. A plaster chef with ruddy cheeks holds up the day’s special, a bowl of “borsch” with half an order of “pelmeny.”

By the time class ended I had the outline of a story, “Searching for Louis.”

April 1

Employment Equity roadshow begins. Took my communications package out to CAW members at the Ogden Shops office. I was the communications rep accompanying Pat Fryers from HR, who was presenting her training session. Very enlightening. The Ogden office conference room is bare-bones and I could hear train horns. Interesting conversations before we started presenting. Someone was selling tickets to a Buzz Hargrove talk and there were a lot of jokes about union presidents buying votes with beer. I was surprised by the openness of the stories and references to drinking, off and on the job. I'm not even allowed to write the word "alcohol" in any of my communications, including features for *The CPR News*.

Cathy Cowie joked about a guy who worked in the Shops, who used to call her (Cathy's) mother every two weeks or so "when he was in the bag." "That's all right," she laughed, gesturing expansively. "My mother knew how to handle him. She's an alcoholic. She told us how the direct payroll deposit caused divorces. "This is the level you're dealing with," Cathy explained. "These guys stand at the bank for it to open for their paycheques. They haven't gone home yet from work." Lots of black humour about lay-offs and packages. Morale is worse in the Shops than it is at head office and it's bad enough there.

They shot down our opening; Fairness. Ability. Pride. Respect. The union members had a lot of questions regarding fairness and don't see employment equity as a fairness issue. "The pride thing is a joke. We do grunt work for a paycheque. Everything else is downtown bullshit." "We run on a seniority system and ability has nothing to do with it." "People do not come to work to take any pride. They're here for their eight hours to collect a paycheque."

Comments on the four designated employment equity groups (women, disabled, indigenous, visible minorities):

- Why train women when they'll leave in two years, get pregnant, etc?
- How many aboriginals pass grade 12? (This is the level of education required by CPR to work in the Shops, raised from grade 10.)
- If a disabled guy can't push a broom as well as I can, why should he have a job?

- We’ve got more than enough visible minorities. We’re already a mini-United Nations.
- How many of these people am I supposed to carry?
- Just so you know, people on the shop floors think the railway is getting kickbacks for hiring these designated groups.
- Nepotism is all right as long as you keep it in the family.
- Is there any way of getting rid of *current* unqualified people?
- Company wants to hire these people because they’re all cheap and will drive down salaries and benefits.

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I kept my head low, just let them vent and kept noting their responses. Eventually the comments became more thoughtful, less knee-jerk and some of the supervisors started speaking. I really started learning about the railway and its frontline employees, and how empty these programs are when real-life issues and barriers are ignored. When everything is reduced to slogans and feel-good copy for head office types (like me).

- All the people we hire are unqualified. We have to train them. Qualifications not an issue. We have to do train-specific training. We need someone who can go on a job and do the duties required, right now. Need for a trade background rather than some general education qualification.

- What if no females apply in any of the trades? We had two female welders, good welders, in the car shop. They couldn’t talk to each other and they left because of isolation. There are problems with security on the night shift.

- Literacy and child care are two serious issues in the trades. Critical child care problems in shift work. (Prime example of an employment barrier.)

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- Ogden has gone out of its way to deter women and the disabled. There are very few disabilities the shop could accommodate. Is the company willing to put money into accommodating disabilities e.g, a wheelchair ramp?

- Is the company serious? They're always serious for the fifteen minutes they pay attention to something.
- My sister has cerebral palsy. She has a job in the federal government. She was up for the job against someone able-bodied with the same qualifications. I agree completely with her getting the job. How else would she even get a foot in the door?
- How do I get in the building? This is the level disabled people are at.
- Literacy is a huge problem, bigger than equity. Guys in the shops come up and get people to help them fill in all the forms and surveys.
- I have native nieces and nephews and I don't want to end up supporting them. They need a chance just like everyone else.
- What about unintentional discrimination? Like offering a woman a ticket to drive a locomotive but not one to operate a forklift?
- Communication from downtown to this shop is nil, well, scattered at best.
- Disabilities are created by the company. The company caused them and now we're going to be laid off on top of it. (I am truly surprised this didn't come up more often.)
- Remember Rocco the clown, how no one wanted to train him?

April 5

Another EE roadshow session, this time for the Maintenance-of-Way track sectionmen in the building below the Palliser. Freezing cold, full ashtrays in corners, pin-ups of naked women not well-concealed in offices. A sign said, "Dirty clothes or boots not allowed in Conference Room." The MWE has refused to participate in the implementation of the employment equity census, so Pat and I expected some heated debate. Right from the outset the plight of the white caucasian male was a hot topic, and when Pat presented her "What EE Can Accomplish" section there was much laughter. Someone guffawed, "All those white people being hired." A lot of talk about government control. Again, it seemed to be most effective to let them joke and vent because after a while they also grew more thoughtful and pointed out some very concrete things I'm sure the company has no intention of addressing.

- Caucasian males. Sounds discriminatory to me.
- Isn't a quota system required by the government? In the old days crippled guys were hidden in the system. Now it's not possible. This means we need a quota to give to the government.
- The government is pulling CPR's strings.
- Will the company go back in the records and see all the people who have done this job and quit? Vietnamese, Indians, etc. It's the white people who have stuck it out. That's a fact.
- Why did Warren quit? Will the company check into those records and see why this guy had to quit?
- Never mind him. That guy had a few screws loose.
- Yeah but *anyone* could get into a situation. Will the company look into these incidents? A new employee you can put aside, forget, but this guy had been here 18 years.
- I believe any record of disability, insurance, etc, will come back at you. I've had carpal tunnel and there's certain tools I avoid (laughter).
- What about back problems. 90% of our department have bad backs.
- Hey, Mike here's no longer Polish. He's a white, caucasian male, he's never faced any discrimination.
- I have trouble reading the material because I'm not very good at English.
- It's reverse discrimination.
- It's a bunch of – crap.
- Asians usually bail.
- This isn't a female-friendly environment. That's just the way it is.
- Bathrooms, for instance. When we're out on the track we usually just open the truck door and go. Women aren't going to do that for obvious reasons.
- We have a lot of people with questionable integrity, a lot of drunks. I've seen people quit here by the ton.
- No two people here in this room are the same. Why do some stay and others leave? Throughout time, we've hired a lot of Indians but they don't stay. Why is that? Is the company going to find out?

- Mike here is an audible minority. He has an accent.
- Everyone in this room feels we are discriminated as the lowest tier at CPR. Prisoners used to do this work. We're scum. Everyone here feels discriminated against and it doesn't matter what race or colour we are. All anyone sees is a dirty slob who works on the track.
- I will not fill out this survey because it's none of the government's business and CPR can go to hell.

April 21

I received an "exclusive and highly confidential Friends of Ralph invitation. Tonight's Ralph-O-Rama was held at the Hard Rock Café in Eau Claire Market. Interesting guest list. Anne, of course. Peta, Larry, Rick and me (the Angels), Dave, Ian, Mary Helen, Jennifer, Debbie-Lyne, Dave Lockwood. Also a surprising number of legal people and CPR Police members. Apparently on the day Ralph was fired he called CP Police and demanded an escort out of the building. "Fuck off Ralph," was the response.

He looked exactly the same, dressed in his green suit. Half hang-dog, half-satanic, Sometimes I think he's a humanitarian gone wrong. Ralph worries about everything, everyone. He is someone with deep feelings and intuition but for whatever reason has inverted. He trawls the subconscious, is uncanny at rooting out people's weaknesses. If only he could use that ability for good instead of just manipulation. Any experience with him is murky, strangely intimate. The first thing he said to me was that he liked the outfit I was wearing, said I should be playing a lute. He proceeded to order us around and bought rounds. Not sure if he paid for any of those rounds or if he suckered someone else into picking up the tab. Long as it wasn't me.

Ralph told me he is worried about me. He's been on this worry kick for a while now. I am also worried about my job and trying not to be furious for moving all the way out here only to be laid off. As usual, I found it impossible to determine what was sincere and what was just a mind-game.

He asked me to picture a path in the woods and guided me through the whole scene. Was this something he picked up in a workshop and wanted to try out on someone? Was this meant for specifically for me? No way of knowing. I was right there, though, on that path through the woods, pebbles underfoot, moon. The “spell” was broken when Dave Lockwood drawled, “Okay, whenever the two of you decide to come out of this existentialist thing.” “Existentialist thing” is a perfect description for what goes on between Ralph and me.

Ralph and I, Jennifer, Mary Helen and Dave Lockwood went on to Buzzard’s. Buzzard’s is dark, cavernous, the Underworld, the Last Chance Texaco. Eventually Mary Helen left, but Jennifer lingered, in a booth with Dave Lockwood. She is head over heels in love with him and she looked so young, her face shining with happiness at being near him. Ralph and I faced each other, perched on stools at the bar. Typical Ralph talk.

I heard his favourite speech yet again, how he loves the railway and hates the company. He said he’s been unhappy for nine years and thinks the company is committing suicide. He isn’t angry at Paul Clark for firing him, it was really Cement Head who did him in. As usual he fluctuated from aggression to self-pity. He talked about his new company for a while, said he would hire me, Mary Helen and Dave Lockwood. Then he said he was forty-six years old, all washed up, no future, etc. He said Ian cried when he heard Ralph was fired. That wasn’t surprising. Ian, D-L and I sat at the hotel bar in Vernon, talking about Ralph and I know how Ian feels about him. I told Ralph the three of us were the hardest hit.

Ralph then said that out of everyone he was most worried about me. Debbie-Lyne and I are feeling very insecure now as we have both created our jobs. He took my hand, told me I was beautiful. He said I was a good writer, a very good writer then said some people wear their hearts on their sleeves, but my soul is out there. Told me again I am one of his favourite people in the world. At about 3:30 a.m, Ralph, Jennifer and I took a taxi to the southeast.

April 26

Critique of “Searching for Louis” tonight. This is a story loosely based on Ralph, which I came up with the night Alberto Manguel taught Aritha’s class. I was really afraid of the reception it would get as it pressed all of Aritha’s buttons; Calgary, the corporate world, etc. I also thought the young people in the class would be bored by it. Well, out of all my stories this year, this one got the best comments. Garlands of praise, in fact.

Anne Hallett: “Searching ...” is a brilliant story. You take a scenario out of its ordinary realm, tweaking and twisting the narrative so that it offers the reader more than a cliché ...”

Susanne Smith: The story is an excellent depiction of office politics and the corporate world ... I thought the dry caustic voice of the narrator using “you” did a good job of portraying the shell that Jo has created in order to deal with the corporate games and the loss of her friend ... I felt terrible when he rejects Jo at the end. We weren’t sure if he was a friend or foe until the end – just like the narrator. Great tension, excellent story.”

Typically thoughtful and thorough critique from Julia Williams. She really liked the story, which thrilled me because I respect her opinion so much. “Good take on cynicism versus enthusiasm and especially refreshing for cynicism to win ... I was impressed by it the whole time I was reading, and I kept thinking about it later in the day ...”

The most surprising and touching critique came from Craig Boyko though. “I have nothing bad to say about this story, which is probably the nicest thing I could say.” He had scrawled two sentences at the end of his typed comments that said, “the more I think about it, the more I like this story. Great job.”

An amusing scene in class: Sheri pronounced that Jo wanted to have sex with Louis. She was hilariously firm about it. It was Aritha, always talking about sex in stories, who said my story was about work. Very amusing reversal.

May 3

Aritha and two other U of C profs, Fred Wah and Nicole Markotic, arranged a group reading as the last class. Three classes, two fiction, one poetry and we all had two minutes in the spotlight. I wrote three railway vignettes for my reading, called “White Eye.” After work, I went to Divinos’s for some mushroom soup and a glass of wine and looked over my material I had just finished my soup when Aritha breezed in. It was getting on to show time and she was “on.” Which was a very good thing because I missed my appointment with her at U of C. It was supposed to have been at four o’clock this afternoon but I put it in my calendar as next week.

She sat down beside me and I apologized profusely. She was in a great good mood, ordered a thin crust pizza and conducted the interview right there at Divino’s. These interviews are conducted by all the creative writing professors at U of C, and some of the questions were a bit difficult to answer. Did I get my money’s worth out of the class? Yes, I did. I got exactly what I wanted, to meet people and make friends outside of work, in Calgary. Was there a difference between what I got in Rosemary’s class and Aritha’s class? This gave me pause. Of course the classes were different. One was general interest, continuing education, the other an academic credit. I praised Rosemary and Aritha said, “Rosemary’s an excellent *trainer*.”

Whose writing did I look most forward to? I hemmed and hawed a bit and she said I was being non-committal. I said I was trained to be non-committal. We talked about the class helping pin-point stories, which is probably the hardest thing for me. She asked me if I liked cooking, she’s always curious about that. She wrote all my responses down in her quick-flowing script. Just the way I do when I’m interviewing my clients for a *CPR News* story or for communications material. Aritha’s eyes really are amazing. Susanne Smith once called them “helter skelter eyes.” Widely spaced, one eye blue, the other closer to amber. She said she could tell I wasn’t afraid of her. With all the weirdness at work, Aritha and the class are a straightforward pleasure in my life. She told me my critiques were excellent and I always had a different way of looking at the stories. She also said she liked how I disagree with her.

Went next door to Beat Niq for the reading. Pulled up a stool, watched everyone arrive, many with friends and family. Saw Nancy Ginzer with her mother and her best friend, Kate. At one point I saw Nancy resting her head on her mother's shoulder, making me wonder what it would be like to have such a close maternal relationship. Julia Williams stopped by, said she really liked my "Louis" story and hoped I'd be taking Aritha's class next year. Sheri came alone, like me, and pulled up the stool beside me. I was grateful for her company. The reading was conducted in reverse alphabetical order, which meant I would be closing the show. I'm glad I only had that one glass of wine at Divino's.

The readings were interesting, often revealing. Aritha made everyone come up with a very brief bio. Lori Wildcat told us what First Nations tribe she's from. Susanne Smith said she's a "lapsed lawyer who'll never write a legal thriller. Nancy Ginzer said she's "an escapee from the CBC. She's been writing short stories for three years and will move on to longer ones." The bio I enjoyed most came from one of the poetry students: "I'm the capitalist running dog in the group." Julia Williams is an excellent reader. Athene Evans read very well and so did James Corbett, who still has his green hair. Intermission. Finally, the end, and my turn. Light in my eyes, couldn't see any faces. Microphone. I launched straight into "White Eye." Felt my voice was strong, well-paced. I didn't run out of breath at any critical points. And it was all over.

I guess I did well. Aritha came over with Fred Wah. Fred shook my hand and said, "That was very powerful writing. A large group of us went on the the James Joyce where I talked about downsizing, lay-offs, etc with Sheri, Marika, Anne Hallett and her husband. We drank beer, talked and signed my copy of the class chapbook Anne had prepared. Some of the signatures I received:

– You are an extremely talented woman. Your work is always thoughtful ... I know that many more of us will have the good fortune of experiencing your literary brilliance. All the best! Anne.

– Leslie – Great year! Pleecease take the course next year! That was an outstanding reading, by the way ... Julia Williams.

– Lesley – You do have very powerful writing. I expect to have to buy your work someday soon. Cheers, Sheri.

**

Received Aritha's evaluation. She said my reading was great and that I was a "natural." She said I have a "powerful and distinctive creative ability." She also gave me an A for critiques, said they were "excellent, thorough and constructive."

**

Lunch at Cannery Row with Bill Fric. He had called me one day and asked me to send him some of the work I did in Aritha's class. So today we met to talk about our writing. Good to see him again and get caught up. His oldest son is doing a lot better these days, has straightened himself out. Bill is very relieved and said it was hard to let go and start treating him as an adult. He admitted he does like to preach. He said he likes my outsider's view of the corporate world and said he knew he'd never be able to stand it. He's returned to work on his novel about the disembodied lawyer that he started in Rosemary's class, and finally worked up the nerve to ask me to look at it. He said he was hesitant because "you're so good." He added, "You're very bright, I can tell by what you write. There's a brain inside that skull." I readily agreed, unable to imagine how I would live up to that.

June 11

Lunch at the Palliser with Bill Fric. He was dressed in a very attractive, expensive-looking suit and tie and I was in a CPR shirt because I was on my way to Golden that afternoon to cover the opening ceremonies of the Swiss Guides festival. Bill joked that I was "wearing the colours." He said he doesn't tell anyone at work about his writing. He also said his wife, Janice, is very nice, but she got madder at him than he's ever seen her when he praised my work too effusively to her one night!

We were both a little nervous, he over what I would say about his ms, me over whether my remarks were helpful. As usual he was both a humble and powerful presence. We talked about work for a while. He's upset because he lost a client, Jager Homes, to a large national law firm. This is his big career worry.

He said he had to go into his own practice because he would never be able to stand the politics inside corporations, he's too much of a loner. I completely understand what he means. I'm the same way, which may be why I'm finding work politics so difficult. We spent the rest of the time discussing the ms, which I liked. I hope at least some of my comments and suggestions will be helpful. Then, right after this pleasant lunch at the Palliser I headed to the Greyhound bus terminal, beginning my trip to Golden.

June 12-13

A guide is "one who leads or directs another in his way or course as in strange country or through difficult terrain." But what happens when the guide finds herself in a strange land? This was the central question of my little jaunt to Golden. It is also the central question of my entire relocation to Calgary and the strangeness of the corporate world.

Greyhound bus from Calgary to Golden. I figured the bus would spare me the anxiety of rental car hell, plus the weather was threatening something and I didn't like the idea of careening through mountain passes in a downpour. Tampa was exciting enough for me. Meanwhile, the bus ride was wonderful. All I had to do was sit back, look out the window and enjoy the timelessness of being in transit. The bus stopped in Banff for a while. I got out to walk around, looking at the serenity of mountains and railway tracks. Cooler, rougher, a sharp tang in the air when we pulled into Lake Louise.

The ride from Lake Louise to Golden was amazing. The highway sidled through mountains while below, the CPR track slunk through the evergreens. Passed the Spiral Tunnels. On my right a wall of rock. To the left a long, long drop.. Turquoise water. Streams rabbling down the cliffs. Light changed to twilight. Old avalanche slides with tough pines still holding on. I find it impossible to write well about this land. How do you convey the magnificence of these views without sounding like an old CPR PR writer? But I still feel compelled to try.

Drove into sunset fire. The bus slowed down for a pair of elk bounding to the side of the road. A black bear grazed dandelions on the mountainside. I thought of good old Cornelius Van Horne, embellishing paintings of the Rockies to make them more attractive to European tourists. “This wilderness is too wild!” Flash flood of shadow.

The bus rattled over a trestle bridge. I looked up at another wall of rock. Spring green larches, dark green of weathered pines. Layers, levels, drops of god-knows-how-many feet. We reached Golden, a town cradled in mountains. It is a tougher town than either Banff or Lake Louise. The Greyhound depot is attached to a restaurant/variety store. And no, there were no taxis hanging around the station. I looked around at the truck stop, motels, a neon red “Inn” sign bled into twilight. Purpling mountains. I asked the cashier to call a taxi for me and I stood outside the depot, as if in the middle of nowhere. No taxi arrived and I called Hildegard Bunnell, the “manageress” of the Edelweiss Chalet, hoping I could still check in as it was 10:30 or so. You’d never know it by the light, though, which looked and felt at least half an hour earlier.

Hildegard came to the bus depot to pick me up. The Edelweiss Chalet is part of her house and is up the mountain along a curving gravel road. “Watch out for Blackie,” she said (Blackie being a black bear and frequent visitor). “He’s a good guy. I just wouldn’t get too close to him.” The car kept climbing and when she told me how she rode her bike up and down the road regularly I felt like a puny head office wretch.

A whitewashed wall proclaimed “Edelweiss Village.” Staring down at me from the bluffs was a collection of houses that looked like a weird hybrid of Swiss chalet, Canadian farmhouse and Japanese temple. They also looked Goth, tall narrow structures perched on cliffs in increasing darkness. Pointed roofs, gingerbread trimming. They looked surreal, as if created by a survivalist colony of people who had taken to the mountains. In reality, the six chalets were all built by the CPR in 1912 and called Edelweiss Village.

The village was created for the Swiss mountain guides the railway brought over to make mountaineering safe and increase its tourism revenue. By 1886 the CPR snaked across Canada through some of the most beautiful mountain country in the world. The railway, under the auspices of Cornelius Van Horne, built a string of hotels to increase tourism; Glacier House, Field, Lake Louise.

Enticed by the railway's ad campaigns people from all over the world came to climb the mountains, but there were no professional guides and an accident was inevitable. One of the climbers, Philip Abbot of the Appalachian Mountain Club, fell to his death. The accident became a PR nightmare, for both the CPR and the sport of mountaineering. Critics decried the sport as "futile, aimless and dangerous." In response, the railway engaged the services of two Swiss guides, Edward Feuz Sr and his friend Christian Haesler. They were successful and increased the demand for guide trips. This impelled the CPR to expand the program by adding three more guides the following year.

It was demanding work and by 1903 the original guides were in their mid-forties. The popularity of climbing in the Rockies boomed and younger relatives of the original guides came to Canada to help out. By 1910, the CPR was having trouble enticing enough guides to return to Canada for seasonal work as it meant leaving their families and homelands. So the railway decided to establish a Swiss community in the mountains to ensure the availability of guides by making them feel more at home. The CPR chose the town of Golden as the mid-point between Glacier House and Lake Louise.

The guides moved into six "authentic" chalets in 1912. The CPR saw the community as a tourist attraction as well as housing for the guides. The company also saw the development of a Swiss farming community. It erected a sign right by the tracks for the benefit of its passengers, "CPR Swiss Guides' Village. Edelweiss." The plan didn't quite work out as conceived, however, and CPR sold the property to Walter Feuz in 1959.

At night the chalets look haunted, hidden among the trees, perched on their eeries. An eerie enclave. Hildegard took me to the Edelweiss Chalet, which turned out to be a large suite in her house. I was stranded in the middle of nowhere without transportation. Before me, a row of white-veined mountains, the town below cauled in mist. Battalions of evergreens. Lunar blue gravel road. I entered the spacious but spartan suite, unsure if I had crossed a time zone.

Lying in an unfamiliar bed listening to weather reports for coastal BC on the CBC (the only station available), I wondered how the guides and their families felt, if the Rockies really were like “Fifty Switzerlands in One” to them. In a way the railway is all about itinerancy, relocation, migration and the story of the guides is part of it. I wondered what happens to planned communities when their *raison d’être* disappears, or when they are subject to the vagaries of a corporations’s fortunes. Could a real Swiss guide ever fit into a CPR dream of Switzerland and mountaineering?

**

Set off bright and early for the opening ceremonies of the Swiss Guides Festival held at Walter Feuz’s chalet. I walked up and up and up a gravel turn-off, wondering if I could haul my head office butt up the mountain where I thought Edelweiss Village was located. Instead, I reached an archery range. I had climbed way higher than necessary. The archers warned me away from proceeding along the route I was on – grizzlies. Oh good. I could be gobbled by a grizzly or end up with an arrow through my head.

Finally made it to the Edelweiss Village compound. Six houses in total, rented out at the present time. From two Swiss guides a community grew enough to hold a festival, including descendants of the guides, members of the Feuz family, local reporters. I staked out a picnic table and was joined by members of local media. Met Gail Burley from *the Golden News*. Very nice. We hung out together. She’s forty and said she got her job as reporter just by going down to the office and asking if they needed her. She loves the variety, the people she meets. Speeches, wine and cheese reception. Bruno Dobbler, the honorary consul from Switzerland, a trim elderly man in a heavy suit spoke of the guides: “Their early lives were hard and it was a long way from home ... Maybe we can entice some more Swiss to come over.”

Bruno Engler, patron of the festival is a craggy animated man with a really interesting life story. He emigrated from Lugano, Switzerland, to Canada at age twenty-three. In his first year he became the first ski instructor for Brewster and Sunshine. He was also one of the last Swiss guides contracted by the CPR. He was hired at Chateau Lake Louise where he worked with legendary mountaineers, Ernest Feuz and Rudolph Aemmer.

“I came to Canada in 1939. The conductor said, ‘Watch for Edelweiss Village. There was a big sign by the railway, CPR Swiss Guides Village. The train slowed down and the conductor explained it was the home of famous CPR Swiss guides. It’s funny, but although CPR advertised Swiss guides all over Europe, I had never heard of them ... the King had Swiss guides, the Pope had Swiss guides, the CPR had Swiss guides.” Everyone laughed and I had a perfect quote for the railway. After the speeches ended conversation revolved around how long people had lived in the community. “Our family has been here thirty-five years,” one man proudly announced, right after being introduced to me.

But a tour of the Walter Feuz chalet gave me a sense of how hard the guides’ lives must have been. If I thought relocating to Calgary was hard, it was nothing compared to emigrating in 1912. The house is a narrow farmhouse with Swiss-like embellishments, divided into small rooms; in no way like the chalets back home. “When the Swiss Guides first came they were appalled,” said Holly Magoon, special events coordinator and tour guide. “The houses weren’t anything like real Swiss houses. They called them ‘monkey cages.’”

“They came over and found reality very different from what the CPR made it out to be. They had to pay ten dollars a month. There was no livestock, no furniture. They couldn’t garden in the gravelly soil. Besides, they weren’t farmers or gardeners, they were professional mountain guides. The wives were very homesick. They were promised furnished homes but when they arrived the houses were empty.” A CPR train horn sounded at that moment, drowning out the alpenhorn and hammered dulcimer playing outside the house. Because of the mountains, you can hear the train horn wherever you go in Golden, louder than you’ve ever heard it. Very appropriate.

Met various people. One local photographer thought I was with Canadian Press, which flattered me to no end. Gail Burley drove me down the mountain into town. On the way she spotted a pick-up truck on fire and pulled in to take pictures of it. She then took me on to the Purcell Heli-Skiing Day Lodge to see Bruno Engler’s photography exhibit. He was in his element, playing the role of elder statesman, raconteur, holding court. “If you wanted to climb you had to learn how to bushwack,” I heard him say. His photos were fluid, black and white mountain scenes, reminiscent of Ansel Adams.

From there Gail drove me into downtown Golden where I took in the Swiss Guides Family Life exhibit at the museum. I even received an individual tour by Anita Arsenault. I had a good look at the sketch plan for the original Edelweiss Village, recalling Holly Magoon's description of the gravelly soil. I saw that every section of land on that blueprint was designated as "rock soil," "swamp," etc.

The photos gave me a sense of what it must have been like as a newcomer to Canada in 1912. Unlike the manicured forests of Europe the guides faced real wilderness in Golden, BC. The TransCanada didn't exist. No paths existed near the hotels and tiny outposts created by the railway. Golden was an isolated frontier village noted for its sawmill. "The company offered them ten acre plots because it wanted the guides to be farmers. Even those who farmed the land couldn't sell it," said Arsenault. "Ed Feuz, the son of Ernest, was very outspoken about the CPR for many years. He resented living up on the hillside in that fake Swiss zoo."

Arsenault then asked if I had heard the story of Gertie Feuz. Such is the power of the Feuz family name in Golden I had already heard snippets of the story. "You had to walk to school along the railroad tracks because that was the only thing that was cleared. One day, Ed Feuz's daughter Gertie was going to school in winter and it snowed. She was walking along the track and the plow came along, pitched her into the snow, almost burying her. She was lucky that the men on the plow saw her. They dug her out and took her home." I had the feeling I was getting a private CPR head office employee tour but was very grateful for all of Arsenault's time and information and she really did give me a lot to think about.

After leaving the museum I tramped around Golden. I couldn't return to the hotel and make it back downtown in time for the gala. *Life is Beautiful* was playing at the cinema but I had already seen it in Calgary. Golden is not a developed tourist town, which is ironic considering the story of the Swiss guides. No boutiques with cute names. Restaurants are steak and pasta places, or Chinese-Western. A lot of gravel and dust. It looks like a western industrial town and I was told the town's two largest employers are a forestry company and the CPR.

It's a place of truck stops and railway services. Hildegard Bunnell's husband told me one of their regular guests is a man who comes up from Florida once a year. Not for the mountains, but to see the trains. The only exotic thing about Golden is that eerie enclave of "monkey cages" strung along the bluffs.

**

Headed to the Civic Centre for the dinner, reception and a play, *The Mountain Show*. I was surrounded by faces that were now familiar. Someone behind me in line asked his companion if any of the Feuz family had "kicked up a fuss this year." A day in town and I knew exactly who and what he was talking about.

The room looked like it was set up for a wedding reception. No air conditioning; hot. Dress ranged from shorts to extremely formal. I greeted reps from CP Hotels and Bruno Doppler, the Swiss consul. Holly Magoon placed me at the "CPR table." Her husband is a carman for the railway. I sat beside Jonathan Hanna and we talked about work the whole time. Next table over, Barbara Friedli and Feuz family members. *The Mountain Show* was a dramatization of the original Swiss guides in Canada. Lots of digs at the CPR, which deserves every one of them.

While standing in line for a glass of wine a couple approached me. Turned out that Fred and I had met them at the medieval feast in Cochrane. I couldn't remember her name but he was Gerald Reid, and also the playwright. We couldn't get over running into each other again in Golden. It was that kind of weekend. I threatened to sue Gerald on behalf of the CPR. We also joked about how his daughter placed the evil railway magnate in the stockade at the medieval feast.

A tiny bright-eyed elderly woman gave me a ride back up the mountain. Her car seat was pushed as close as possible to the steering wheel and she sat bolt upright at the wheel. She played a rock station in her big van. I found out the next morning from Hildegard she was no less a personage than Jean Feuz, Walter's wife, and current owner of the Edelweiss property.

**

Bright and early Sunday morning Hildegard called a man named Norbert to drove me to the Keith King Memorial Park for the costume picnic party. She herself was going to church as usual, having little use for the Feuzs or the Swiss guide hoopla. We swooped into the valley then back up another mountain. Golden really is placed in a bowl. I enjoy getting rides from people. They'll tell you things in the car "just to make conversation," which is so often better than any kind of planned interview.

At first, the awkwardness of not knowing what to do, where to go. Moved nomadically around the picnic site and watched the arrival of the usual suspects. Holly Magoon bustled around. Lots of costumes, more alpenhorns. The actors from *the Mountain Show* appeared in their costumes. Then I spied Bruno Engler. I really wanted to speak with him and as soon as I saw him alone I ditched my lunch and made a beeline toward him.

"What I did hear in Switzerland was that Banff was the Somme Ritz of Canada," Bruno said, continuing a story he had started telling me yesterday. "When I got there it was all bush. I didn't know where there could be skiing. All I saw was this big hotel sticking out of the bush. CPR. We had to go into this contraption of a Model A4 to go to the famous Sunshine resort. After twelve miles they stopped and said it was the end of the road. They said the rest of the way had to be done by horse. But I skied. When I came to the lodge I said, 'Where's the lodge?' They'd only put cows in a lodge like this.'

But he also said: "In Switzerland everything is busy. Here I found the solitude. I could look out and see virgin snow, no ski tracks. Twice a day I took people up. That was my day. We took meals together, became family." Listening to the music, seeing the children in costume, people greeting each other I could almost forget the dark hidden "monkey cages," the "Golden Ghetto" perched above the ubiquitous steel rail.

**

Left the picnic to visit Jonathan Hanna who was staffing the CPR display train. I started walking down the long road into town. A van stopped. It was Gordon Barlow and his family. His daughter, Julie, was with them, still in her period costume. She also appeared in the Mountain Show. Gordon said, "We can't have Lois Lane wearing herself out." He drove me to the display train and we all toured it.

I sidled through the display train cars, took in the display of Swiss guide photos from CPR Archives. I noted that a photo on display in the train, Georgia Englehard climbing with Edward Feuz, said "CPR Guide, Edward Feuz." The same photo had appeared in some of the Golden tourist material. Their caption read, "Swiss Guide, Edward Feuz."

It was a good weekend for attendance. Jonathan said four hundred people went through it. Today, there was an influx from the picnic. The people I saw on the train seemed to enjoy it very much. One woman couldn't pull her children away from the flashing crossbucks or the safety video. Her son pretended he was a locomotive engineer. A man described a CPR spittoon he keeps by his fireplace. Brass, with CPR embossed on it. "Just don't ever dare spit in it," he joked.

I offered to help Jonathan close up the train but I couldn't because I didn't have any safety fear. "If I let you do anything and you put out your back or something I'm toast," he said. SO I watched him lay everything not attached to the walls on their sides. He had to shimmy over the back of the car to pull the metal steps up.

"There should be two people doing this," he said. "But one time this burly guy from the yards showed up and insisted I could do it all by myself. 'What's the matter with you,' he demanded. It's such a hassle trying to get anyone else out I usually end up being the only one. There was one time I was climbing this part here, and it had snowed so there was a glaze of ice on the handle and the ledge here. I was pulling up the steps. Next thing you know I'm lying down here. It's just a good thing nothing bad happened."

Figures. Seems to me that when it comes to the CPR you're on your own, whether you're a Swiss guide or doing public relations for the railway.

July 22

Fin du monde picnic with Ralph and the Angels in a park on 16th Ave. Peta, Rick, Larry, Judy, Mary Helen, Jennifer, Dave Lockwood, John Timmins and me. Ralph appeared with a cooler. Like a magician pulling rabbits out of a hat, he pulled out bottles called Hooch and a wine called Fin du Monde, which he said was appropriate since we were all going to toast the great CPR downsizing. “The Incredible Shrinking Company,” joked Rick.

To back up a little, CPR officially announced its bad Q2 results. Ensuing media circus, items about the stricken railway in *the Herald*, *Globe & Mail*, etc. The editorial cartoon in *the Herald* depicted a CPR locomotive chugging uphill pulling a car that said, “Shareholders.” A second car, captioned “Employees” plummeted backwards down the hill. Currently the railway is reporting cuts of 1900 employees across the system, but the real number will be 5,000 by the time the purges end. This is the background of our Fin du Monde picnic.

Hot sun beat down on us. Someone had just watered the grass (just before lunch) and it was soaking wet, so we perched in a row on the sidewalk and munched on our sandwiches. Ralph passed around photos of his and Anne’s new house in Thunder Bay. More background: Anne accepted a promotion as General Manager of Operations, Thunder Bay division. The house is big and bland, located in a treeless suburb, similar to what they have in Douglasdale. Scattershot of acerbic comments directed at each one of us. He passed the plastic wrapped wine bottle to John Timmins. They swigged and growled like winos. John spilled something on his pants, lurched around in sunglasses, untucked shirt. We talked about “Mr Burns’s” (Paul Clark’s) awful department meeting.

John Timmins played Frisbee with himself. Judy sat ladylike on the grass. As usual her high little voice countered the wicked look in her brown eyes, the diabolical smile that often appears on her soft face. Mary Helen, bright-eyed, trying to join in but not feeling included. Ralph dismissed her with a remark about her working in BIS and not with the rest of us. She hates being associated with BIS. She was the one who asked all the questions about Ralph’s new house.

Rick was very quiet. We've come to depend on his sense of humour and his gallantry. One of the best people I know. Larry, on the other hand, is one of Ralph's true followers. Larry seems to love being the butt of Ralph's jokes and becomes sharper with comebacks and laughter. He drinks more too when he's around Ralph, but that's true of all of us. I could see him bask when Ralph said, "Larry, you're getting sharp."

Larry asked Ralph how he was going to spend the rest of this fine day. "Lesley and I are going to the casino," he stated. Sounded a lot more interesting than returning to the office so I shrugged and went along with it.

He raced through a gas station parking lot, zig-zagged onto the Macleod Trail to the casino, the one overlooking the Elbow River, which I pass every day on the bus. The casino is part of the Elbow River Inn and a banner above the entrance says only, Casino. No other name is necessary, I suppose. Ralph wouldn't let me take my backpack into the casino, made me lock it up in the trunk. I told him I didn't have any pockets, all my money, cards etc were in the bag. "No," he said and ushered me in the door.

Dim lights. Sepulchral. It was like being in a waterless aquarium. Long green gaming tables with people earnestly turning up cards. Pressure-cooker concentration. Eerie little sounds emitting from machines. Occasionally a screen would discreetly light up. Ralph plunked me down at a machine and went and got change. "Half for you and half for me," he said. "If you win, you give me fifty per cent." I told him it was his money, all winnings were his. "No. Forget that shit." The server came by. I ordered a white wine and he ordered a double vodka something. The server discreetly set the drinks beside us at the machines.

He was companionable as we worked the machines and built up points. Clatter of quarters falling into the trough, the loudest noise in the place. Scooped up change, filled little plastic bowls. I had no idea how much money he was putting into this but he seemed to be getting it all back. It seemed as if I had gained as well as I kept getting extra turns, but I couldn't really tell. I assume you're not supposed to know. Went to the teller who sat behind plexiglass and exchanged quarters for bills and more change to play the next level up. We played Fort Knox, Pirates and Piggies. The pirate would appear and go "Ha-a-ar." The piggies laughed wickedly. The server returned with more drinks. "The noise must drive you nuts all day," I said. "Oh it does," she replied.

Ralph and I went on to the races where little horses jerked around a track. “Just pick the names you like,” he said. “Anything that sounds good.” Again we must have won something because we returned to the cashier to change more quarters into bills, water into wine.

We went to the Buon Giorno restaurant on 17th Ave. Seafood banquet and more wine. He asked me if I was okay. He always asks me that and I have always assumed he’s just trying to keep me on edge. “I’m fine,” I replied, as always. After a length pause, he said, “I feel so bad about bringing all of you out here. “I’m so sorry about that. I feel the worst about you.”

“Don’t feel bad,” I said. “How could you know? We all came, we all had our own reasons.” In fact, if I were to blame anyone it would be myself. That time in Windsor Station before the move should have given me a clue.

“No, I feel completely responsible.”

The conversation turned to my relationship with Fred.

“When I first met Fred I liked him. But soon discovered he’s just a control freak.”

“Yeah. That’s what he’s turned into.”

“Peta loves you,” he said.

“I love Peta.”

**

I don’t remember the drive to Douglasdale. The house was achingly empty but these houses always seem that way to me. The entrance was glacial, the funeral parlour room looked particularly sterile.

“I’ve never needed or wanted a house like this,” I said.

“Me neither,” he said. “Just a small studio.”

Ralph opened a bottle of champagne and played old 78s. Billie Holliday, the Tommy Dorsey Orchestra, Patti Page, the Andrews Sisters. “I’m old-fashioned,” he said. “I’m not macho. Dave Jones is.”

He gestured at me and we show-danced a few numbers.

“Just relax,” he said. “Follow me.”

“I never learned how to dance to that kind of music. I can’t follow.”

“That’s your whole problem. You can’t lead and you can’t follow.”

I did dance 1920s flapper style and kicked my legs up.

We sat at the bar and he eased into a smooth, half-mocking deejay voice. “We’re heading into the early hours, broadcasting live from Douglasdale. Lesley Battler spins the platters for all you insomniacs out there. Take it, Lesley Battler.”

“In the still of the night when no one else is around we’re still here for you, keeping you company, playing the music of your heart’s desire.”

“Nice,” he said.

He played some of his albums. Travelling Wilburys, Dylan. We listened to “Tweeter and the Monkey Man” and wailed along with Rickie Lee Jones’s “Last Chance Texaco.” Then he said, “Here, I’ll play you my favourite music of all time. No one’s ever heard it.” I was sure Anne has heard it but didn’t say anything. We sat with our backs against the couch. The album was simply called Leveiller-Gagnon (André Gagnon). Beautiful piano pieces. “I always wanted to make a movie with this as the background,” he said. A scene, ice melting. You see the ice, fragile, delicate on the verge of disappearing but caught just before it does.”

“Why didn’t you do it?”

“Because I’m an asshole.”

“Why don’t you make it now?”

“I’m all washed up. CP Rail ate up eighteen years of my life.” Then, “I’m never coming back to Calgary.”

“Then none of us will get to see you.”

“No one cares.”

“The Angels, everyone who came out to the park. You see who comes out when your name is mentioned.”

“That’s because I’m the goddamn boss.”

“Do you think that collection of nuts in the park would go anywhere because of a boss. If it were a Len picnic would anyone show?”

Ralph did laugh at that.

Eventually I woke up on the brown couch, the sky flushed early morning pink.

Aug. 7

Ken Smith's retirement party, Douglasdale, held by Ralph. The Monday after Fin du monde, Ralph sent a message to Peta asking her to help arrange Ken's party. Peta forwarded the message saying, "Angels, let's do our thing!!" I was recruited for copy. I took a David Wilkie song, "Buckin' Bronco" and wrote an epic for Ken Smith. I had fun working in all kinds of Ken Smith's catchphrases.

But I was thinking more about Ralph. He will be leaving soon for Thunder Bay and no one has mentioned giving a party for him. I thought we could combine the two. Peta was enthusiastic and I came up with a concept I thought would be perfect for Ralph. Re-creating the Sgt Pepper album, replacing those faces with our faces. An album cover complete with liner notes, looking as authentic as possible, only with random lyrics changed to refer to the Angels. I sent a message to Peta asking if this could be done. She replied, "You bet!" She got Rick to scan the album cover and photoshop our faces on the cover. I doctored up the lyrics. One of the most difficult things I've ever tried to work with, but when it was finished it glowed. It was truly a living thing. Even John Timmins said it was a good piece of work. Sgt Pepper turned out to be *my* Sgt Pepper.

Went to the party with Jennifer. I wasn't too sure how well I'd be received as I didn't remember anything about the Fin du monde night after falling asleep on the couch. But Ralph greeted me warmly, kissed me on both cheeks then followed suit with Jennifer. I was relieved. We helped with balloons and streamers. Ralph had printed out Web pages featuring various Ken Smiths and taped them up along the bar. My favourite was, "Ken Smith's Guide to the Bible." We joked. "Here's Ken in his real estate/car salesman/nuclear physicist/preacher stage." We put up Ralph's big banner. Typical Ralph fare: "Smitty Pulls the Pin. Q: What do you do if Ken tosses you a pin? A: Run for your life, he has a grenade in his mouth."

People arrived. Mostly the usual suspects, as those who hate Ralph generally hate Ken Smith as well. Dave and Erika came with little Emma and they almost looked like Victorians on a picnic. A lot of CPR legal services people came and since I didn't know them I went for a walk through the neighbourhood. All beige, treeless, identical steroid-enhanced houses. No parks, no public playgrounds. I'll take Fairview any day over this.

When I returned I discovered Peta had assembled everyone and they had just finished performing my epic to Ken Smith. I not only missed performing it myself but I missed the performance. Erika looked over at me and said, “It’s brilliant.” Ralph, who was standing at a podium, gestured at me and said, “the poet.” Then he read his own speech for KS – quick, snappy, full of barbs and very affectionate. Typical Ralph.

The Ken Smith cake was unveiled in the rec room and Ralph ordered Jennifer to take pictures. He gestured at me to join Ken in cutting it. “I want the poet here.” But I demurred. I was never close to KS, and for some reason I didn’t want my presence recorded. Linda Patterson posed instead.

Ralph spent most of the time sitting in a lawn chair and when people went to say goodbye to him he tossed off, “Bye. See ya.” I wondered if that was how he would say goodbye to his department. Peta then buttonholed me: time for the Sgt Pepper presentation. She had found a vintage jacket (very Pepperish) in her basement and bundled me into it. Perfect. Rick and Dave Lockwood set up speakers and found Ralph’s St Pepper tape to play. Peta, Rick, Larry and I walked out to the music, stood in front of Ralph and sang the first three songs of Sgt Pepper, only with the lyrics I had written about us. Peta even thought to provide song sheets! Ralph was blown away. He picked out familiar faces and showed it to everyone who came by. He asked me if I was behind “Sgt Pepper.” I said it was created by the Angels. Apparently Peta told him it was all my idea so I owned up. He nodded.

Later, darker, a small group clustered on lawnchairs. Ian and Jennifer Leonard, my friend Jennifer St John, Dave Lockwood, Ken Smith and Ralph, of course, holding court. Our eyes met when he asked if anyone had seen the movie *Little Voice*. I was the only one who had and we both agreed it was wonderful. Ralph and Jennifer L sparred, one-liners zinging through the air. Ralph kept claiming he was Dave Lockwood’s agent and ordered him to change his rock group’s name. We all agreed that “the Burn” sucks.

Ian told stories about Marc Shannon and Paul Guthrie at the CWB hearings. Shannon is a brutal lawyer and they come on as “good cop/bad cop.” Ian and I started taking about The The. He loves *Soul Mining* as much as I do. And then he tipped over backwards in his chair. Ken Smith was spending the night at Ralph’s and he went to bed.

Everyone left, I was going to leave with Jennifer St John, when Ralph said in a low voice, “Stay.” So I did.

“*You* did Sgt Pepper.”

“It was only my idea, those guys did it.”

“That’s the kind of thing I used to do. By the way, you upstaged me with your poem.”

We went inside, sat down at the computer and he showed me his novel. He has actually started it and had a few pages on screen. It was fast-paced and Aritha would say it “has legs.” I looked at the mementos he had pinned to his bulletin board. He is very orderly and also sentimental.

I noticed a photo of his daughter from an ex-wife. I think Anne’s his second, but who really knows? She has his colouring, strawberry-blond hair. Her expression made me wonder if she inherited his depression. “Are you close?” I asked. “Na-a-ah.” I found a black and white class picture, tiny class, all boys and I wish I had asked him where it was taken. I was never in a class with fewer than thirty kids in Ontario. “Which one is me?” he asked. I picked a cute blond kid, grinning in the front row, figuring Ralph was putting on an act. Wrong. “Pick the stupidest looking kid in the picture. ‘What’s going on?’ I never did know.” Turned out to be a larger kid, standing straight, chin up, no expression. Yes, that would be the one.

It was a long, surreal drunken conversation that lasted all night. I only managed to remember parts of it. We talked about work again. He will never get over being fired from the company. He’s also still trying to get me to badmouth Dave Jones, which I refuse to do. Obviously some male rivalry going on there. “Dave’s jealous you know,” said Ralph. “He has an ego.”

“I know that but I still like him.”

“Dave’s one of my best friends but I was starting to move him out. He only has an IQ of 142. You’re a 171 and I’m 185. By the way, I hate the goddamn paper (*the CPR News*).”

He admitted his PhD is mail-order and he paid \$7.50 for it. He also said he left school at grade ten. Then he said, “Who do you think got Peta to start asking you for work? Peta adopted you but who do you think was behind that?” I’m pretty sure Peta was behind that, but I thanked him for encouraging our partnership.

“What do you think of Peta?”

“I love her.”

“Yeah yeah, I know you love her but what do you think of her?”

“Very complex.”

“Hoo yeah. You should stop thinking of her as your mentor.”

“But she is.”

“You’re the talent, you’re the one doing the things I used to do, you’re the heir apparent or would be in a more perfect world. You come up with the ideas. Without that, they’re nothing.”

“Well without them, none of my ideas would ever see the light of day.”

“What is this,” he asked softly. “I’ve been asking myself that.”

“Me too.”

“Have you ever been to Prince Edward Island?”

“Yeah, quite a while ago.”

“What do you think of when you think of PEI?”

“The beaches, dunes, red roads, rocks like warm cookies.”

“Kindred spirits,” he said. Anne of Green Gables. I believe we’re kindred spirits. Do you think – do you *believe* that?”

“Yes, I do believe that.”

“We can run away together.”

“Wha-a-a-a...”

“Want to run away together? We could do that. There’s no reason we can’t.” He opened his arms as if offering me the sun, moon and stars. That grin.

“You’re moving,” I said. “You just sold your house and you’re moving across the country. Aren’t you happy about it?”

“I’m not happy in the slightest.”

Eventually he took one couch and I took the other. The last thing he said was, “I *love* Sgt Pepper.” I could not face Anne or Ken Smith in the morning light. As soon as he was sound asleep I slipped out the front door and called a taxi from the pay phone at a gas station store.

Sept. 3

The Great Escape. Set off on the journey right after work. Not a moment too soon. It was an interminable week topped by Paul Clark’s hand-wringing schoolmaster shtick at the departmental meeting. Isabel and Ian both think I should just cut and run. It’s hard to imagine coming back; I have nothing to return to. I feel as if I am on the lam. Then there was the emotional wringer of that Sgt Pepper night with Ralph. The sense of loss, not only of a boss who at least let me build a job, but of the best team I have ever worked with in my life, one he put together.

Southern Alberta. Fields, thickets in the seams of the coulees, a few scattered houses, mountains bluing in the distance, a CPR train glinting in late light. This train is bound for glory, this train. Down Highway 2 into Montana. Past stores, small houses, crippled economies and uneasy domestic arrangements, American hotels standing tall and boxy, cattle pens, fences twirled up in morning glories, an Indigenous boy bouncing a ball against red front steps. Beyond the houses, yards and fences are bluffs.

Reservation territory. Variety stores with dreamcatcher symbols. Abandoned gas stations, casinos. The road dips, rises, a grassy ridge opens into a wide valley. Followed by the BNSF railway. Grain elevators, Big Agriculture. Legion halls, bars/lounges clustered around industrial agricultural structures. Late night lights in tiny offices.

Night driving, trying to follow the road without knowing where it led. Traffic lights danced in the distance like willo-the-wisps, disappearing in a dip in the road as if swallowed up by the earth. Intermittent construction zones, which occasionally made me lose my bearings, the broken white lines seemed to lead off over cliffs. Fields soaring like alien runways. Sign in a tiny town congratulating the Class of 1988. Closed cafés.

We had set up the air mattress and sleeping bag in the back of the Mothership. I crept back there, cocooned in the sleeping bag while Fred drove on. I felt the car move, gravel hitting the wheels, intermittent lights of new outposts, slowing, stopping, speeding up. Stars in the back window. Imagined being abducted. Lights of towns, farmhouses, big factories, twinkling like carnivals. Fields narrowed into town squares, space rushing into warmth and light. These fields you could end up adrift on, never to be heard from again. Thor Heyerdahl in a mothership. Hiding from the railway fatwa as Peta and I joked about. Stopped for the night on a dirt road just east of Malta. Stars, soft evergreens.

Sept. 4

Sailed on into the grey dawn. Detoured to Fort Peck on the Missouri River, which was soft and shadowy as if seen in candlelight. Life through the windshield. Overcast, misty, intermittent rain. Stopped at a picnic site in Culbertson for lunch. Crossed the Montana/North Dakota border. Took a break at Minot (pronounced “My-not”). Serious shifts in geography. The high hilly land of Montana lowered until we were driving through lowlands that resembled fields in the Netherlands. Clouds formed pictographs in the sky. Stopped at a tourist info place and discovered it’s the geographic centre of North America, where west becomes east. My senses hadn’t been deceiving me, the land was becoming eastern. There is a point at which this happens, not just in my own mind.

By the time we reached Crookston, North Dakota, the landscape was recognizably eastern, real rivers and lakes. Church spires replaced grain elevators. Towns with sidewalks. Tallest buildings I’ve seen for days, brick mercantile buildings, one dated 1830, lined the street. Trees were taller, older. A Carnegie library. River, bridge, parklands. We ate at a family restaurant where a model train ran along a track just below the ceiling, all through the restaurant. By the entrance, a great hairy Big Foot statue. Stopped for the night by a pipeline right-of-way east of Bemidji, Minnesota, a university town.

Something I have learned is how important physical geography is. A sense of home is more than feeling or memory. It's there in the geography, the lay of the land, trees, lakes, the presence of sky. The land forms our memories and allegiances. These feelings are coded inside us. It isn't just the beautiful old buildings or the history I miss in Montréal, it's the leaves in the corners, the way light shines through oak and maple leaves, the lushness of dew-soaked grass, a window peeking through branches, mushrooms, stepping around earthworms on the sidewalk, the smell of must.

Sept. 5

Early start. Fred was stopped for speeding but the cop was friendly and knew about the lack of speeding restrictions in Montana and let him go without a ticket. I had the feeling he may have pulled us over more out of curiosity, due to our muddy car with Alberta plates. Minnesota/Michigan. Soft air, soft skin. No more lizard skin. Woods behind houses now, lakes where islands crop out of the water like castles. I drove through Ashland and to my left, Lake Superior! Ships, wide docks, so much water.

We entered "Shield Country," rocks, maples, nowhere near peak autumn colours but some splashes of orange and scarlet. Shore crowded with cabin motels, little patched houses, a water tower proclaiming the glory of the "Wildcats." As the landscape changed so did the temperature. When we began our journey it was three degrees in Alberta. Now we were at twenty-nine degrees and we had to stop and change into t-shirts. This reminded me that unlike Calgary, the "east" had suffered through a brutal heatwave this summer and it was dry while Calgary was cold and rainy. "Bo's Country Store." Houses sailing the crest of rocks.. We've outlasted the prairies, came out from the fields and bluffs into the land of lakes and now into Michigan.

Stopped at De Yoopers Tourist Trap where I got an answer to my question: what, besides Union Pacific does UP stand for? Upper Peninsula. People who live here are known as "Yoopers." "When you cross the bridge you leave the UP and become a troll."

Yoopers are more or less Canadian hosers and Da Yooper's Tourist Trap is a hilariously juvenile museum devoted to beer, hunting and mosquitos. A lot of work went into this place and its dummies, rubber masks, fried up eyeballs lying in a pool of blood, the Outhouse exhibit. A witch splattered against the side of the gift shop. Impressive in its own way. Someone had an idea and saw it through!

Rivers flashed through trees and then the land completely opened up along Lake Superior. Beaches! We ate at a Big Boy and called Connie Crew in Lansing. Long stretch to Lansing. Strange coming into a city again. Construction along the Kalamazoo. The exit leading into East Lansing recalled the exit that took me into South Side St Petersburg. Same kind of gas station, derelict houses, autobody shops.

Here there was a ragtag Party Store on the corner, possibly the only place in the country that doesn't serve coffee. Throughout this road trip I have relied on the Cenex chain of gas station/convenience stores for caffeine, bathroom fixes. Coffee is cheap in tiny towns, sometimes only a quarter.

Turned down Hayford Street to Connie's. The street was hidden in foliage, vines twirling down porch posts, huge peony bushes. Connie's house is small from the outside but inside it keeps going back. Greeted by the menagerie. Fred and I had the upstairs room hidden near the front door. It was like climbing up to a B&B room. The waterbed sure felt good. Connie still does nightshift at Michigan U, downloading computer tapes. At around midnight we went to a family restaurant to eat and talk.

Sept. 6

Walk through Connie's neighbourhood. I was amazed by all the greenery. Tree branches formed canopies over the sidewalks, where sidewalks existed. Maybe my eyes have become accustomed to the sparseness of Calgary and any greenery looks tropical to me now. Loud bassy music blowing out the walls of tiny houses. So many people out on their stoops, mothers surrounded by children. A lot of Black men roaming around carrying lunchboxes and duffel bags but I wasn't sure where they were actually going.

Bedsheet curtains, plank doors, torn screens, listing porches, peeling paint, Ceaselessly barking dogs. The neighbourhood reminds me of the reservation I prowled through in Montana. Only here there are so many cars, both working and abandoned, a constant reminder that this is Motor City territory.

Fred, Connie, her friend Andy and I went to the Lansing Labor Day fair. Very blue collar. We indulged in the world's largest soft ice cream cones. Some Jehovah's Witnesses came by, distinguished by their suits and ties and eerily clean-cut look. One of them turned to the crowd, eating at picnic tables, and began the preach. His voice hoarsened as he harangued the hedonists. Reaction was divided. Some, like us, got up and left. One man shouted, "I already know where I'm going!" Others milled around them, taking their brochures and booklets.

I like Connie's thoughtfulness. You can tell she has deep roots, strong connections to family and community just by looking around her house, which is full of family photos. She seems to know everything about Lansing and her neighbourhood. She's interested in sci-fi and has a SETI screen saver on her monitor. Her bookcases are sprinkled with books on psychology, depression and childhood sexual abuse. I wish I could see more of her.

Sept. 7

While Connie and Fred slept in, I drove into downtown Lansing, dodging construction pits and bulldozers. Ended up parking at the East Lansing Vocational College. Students, falling leaves, handsome public buildings. Robber baron mansions converted into lawyers' offices, shaded by oaks. Funny how stately the public buildings look in a place with such a notorious militia. I've come to the conclusion that Americans are obsessed with government the same way they are obsessed with Communism.

Later that day we picked up a feast at Meijer's and Andy stoked up the barbecue. Connie rolled a joint and it hit me hard. In fact, I was so stoned I could hardly move and just sat and nodded a lot like a blissed-out Buddha. But Connie told Fred I was very smart and very talented so I assume no offence was taken.

Sept. 8

After lingering over coffee with Connie Fred and I headed off to Livonia to visit his Aunt Lynn. One of Connie's cats, South, was very clingy and didn't want the company to leave. Lynn wouldn't be home until around four o'clock so we spent a very pleasant afternoon in Ann Arbor. Ann Arbor must be Ur-Campus, the campus to end all campuses. I wonder how many university movies have been filmed here, it looks so familiar. Swarms of students, mascots lumbering around, handing out flyers promoting discounts on computers, books, etc. The library was decorated with a bog banner, "Welcome to the Ann Arbor Library" with its Web address loud and clear to all passersby. It's about time people started emphasizing their Web addresses. Big trees, angled streets, shaded sidewalks, large old frame houses with verandahs.

Student rooms, dorms, frat and sorority houses. Walking streets. You can prowl along these streets that curve and meander, break off and begin again. All kinds of cafés, boutiques, galleries and bookstores not only surround the campus but actually seem to be incorporated into it. A real community, unlike University of Calgary, which is isolated in the middle of nowhere with no amenities except for ATMs and fast food in the student union building. Here in Ann Arbor, every time I saw a Help Wanted sign I wondered what would happen if I simply stayed on, took classes, picked up a few of those jobs in a café or bookstore, rented a room in one of those great frame houses. Lunch at Zingerman's Deli. Best sandwich I've had since leaving Montréal.

On to Livonia. A journey that took me from Connie's little East Lansing bungalow to a very established middle-class suburb of Detroit. Lynn still lives in the family home where Fred's cousins grew up, where he visited as a kid through the sixties and seventies. But when we entered the house I was shocked. The entire house is a labyrinth of paper. Table tops and counters stacked with paper. Church bulletins, letters, missionary correspondence, lists, schedules, memorabilia, unresolved van der Harst matters, McCormick family histories.

Wound my way past pillars of papers, columns of correspondence. The dining room table looked like a barge ferrying paper cargo. The living room looked like a pier with cargo constantly loaded and unloaded. Even the kitchen counters were over-run with paper and I don't know how she managed to prepare dinner.

Although she was diagnosed with a form of lung cancer, she claims she's feeling fine and attributes it to prayer. She is a great communicator, talking, writing, typing. Dissemination. She's also a terrific storyteller and I wish I could capture the way she can melt into inspiration and slip in wry comments at the same time. Interesting duality between her intelligence and faith. She is also not a mother who idealizes her own children and honestly expresses her opinions about them.

At the same time she's indefatigable in keeping her family together. She has instigated a couple of reunions with Peter, Mitzi and kids, Debbie, Mike and kids and Carol's family. Lynn is also still embroiled in the usual European plots and conspiracies. The Conspiracy du Jour revolves around a letter from Oma justifying why Oma had bequeathed the house in Domburg to Enna.

Apparently, some secrecy shrouds the existence of this letter and Fred's mother didn't think Lynn's kids had a right to see it. This irked Lynn so she is typing up copies of the letter and getting Fred to send them to everyone. Long after Fred and I went to bed, we could hear the sound of her typewriter. How Dostoyevskian! Van der Harsts popping out of bushes with secret letter, huddled in dark corners forming clandestine alliances, challenging each other to duels.

Lynn also got all her kids out to a McCormick family reunion. It has always bothered her that her kids know so little about the McCormick side of their family, dominated as it is by the van der Harsts. Lynn said she could join the DAR "if I wanted to, not that I ever would." Her roots in the Michigan area go that far back. I would find it fascinating to exploring her background.

Lynn acknowledged her paper temples with her usual wry humour. “We can get by this. It might be a little difficult but we’re the ones moving, that’ll just stay there. It certainly won’t be going anywhere tonight.” She told us stories about a neighbour, Mary, who always comes to her door with wild stories, catastrophe after catastrophe. “So then Mary’s daughter brought in this parrot. Now this is no parrot, we wouldn’t want that, but a great big bird with claws, flying around the house. Well, the window got opened and out flew the bird. Mary came over in a big panic about the bird escaping and how upset her daughter would be. I said, ‘Mary, the bird is wild and it’s gone. This is a blessing!’”

We also heard how difficult it is for Lynn to divide Oma’s inheritance among her children. “John doesn’t want money, Debbie can’t handle it, Pete needs it and does well with it, Carol already has enough money.” She told us about Debbie and Mike’s bankruptcy woes and Carol’s problems with her son, Peter. “Carol was devastated by the way Peter was treating her,” said Lynn. “I’ve never seen her brought so low. You don’t often see that side of Carol.”

The strangest story Lynn told was about her oldest son, John. He is now an environmental crusader. He collects information on polluting companies, testifies against them and tries to stop them from moving into states with laxer environmental laws. He’s living in Nashville now, facing a lawsuit by National Ash, a company he blocked from moving into the state because of the research he did on their practices. “One night three men were waiting for him, a runner like John, a big bruiser, and the third guy was, I guess, management, whatever. John started running and he did escape from them, but now he’s hiding in a room in Nashville. Being down there has made him lose his quick Detroit-ness, his instinct for survival. He can’t go anywhere, do anything because these people are after him. Now, the sensible thing would be to leave that place and just return once on the date of the court case, but not John. No sir. He can be stubborn like my husband.

As my children get older I can see how they’re all starting to become more stubborn like him. I see it in Pete too. But John, who is so indecisive in little ways, really digs his heels in sometimes, so he’s there. Doing whatever, wherever. So all we can do is pray and trust the Lord is with him. I never give advice, except when I’m asked or when I feel I just have to say something to try to lead them in the right direction, but they live their own lives.”

Fred and I slept in Debbie and Carol's old bedroom, full of "girl stuff," ballet figurines, dolls in Dutch costume, christian books from the 1970s, most of which I recognized. I've just realized through writing this how much Lynn sounds like Oma when she talks about giving (or not giving) advice.

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Breakfast on the deck with Lynn. Amazing how well she navigates around the clutter. "We'll move this. See. We can do it, bit by bit. Carol, of course, is appalled and Pete brought me cardboard suitcases to put my papers in, but he doesn't realize that it's easy just to shove everything into boxes. I have to sort them first. Now *that's* the problem. Why does he think everything's still piled up like this? Oh well, it's more difficult for them than it is for me. We'll just get by however we manage."

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Long trip from Livonia to Oakville, where we stayed with a friend of Fred's from library school, then on to Sharon's house in Etobicoke. She made it through her first week of school after having a year off. She has been compulsively re-doing her house. Floral wallpaper everywhere. The house has a fortress-like feeling to it with the side entrances and the locked doors.

Sept. 11

To Barrie for Boot's wedding. It's finally here, the day she's longed for. No drama, no huge break-up or tearful phone calls at zero hour. Nancy and her friend Carolyn arrived to take Boot to get her hair done. Nancy is maid-of-honour. She looks fabulous, tall and slim, hair pulled back in a soft ponytail. Quick-witted too. I enjoyed our banter in the van. While they were preparing for the big event I wandered through downtown Barrie. Still a case study in boomtown transition. The old brick "main street" buildings interspersed with new nightclubs, boutiques and restaurants, all a welcome sight to me.

A surprising number of old stores and places I remember. Dunlop Street is a little cluttered and the city itself doesn't seem sure if it's a tough small town or a tourist location. It's an uneasy blend of both. Off the main street, past Archer's Arch to the old farm and estate houses still standing. Passed the Professor's house where she, Ron and the girls had lived in a past life. I didn't trip much down Memory Lane at all, though. I was wearing my CPR shirt, the one Larry Stilwell designed for the company store and mostly fantasized I was in town on business.

The ceremony was held in the New Apostolic church. I hope Sharon knows what that is because I have no idea. The church was small, spare but suffused in light, a little like the Nazarene. The service was the shortest I've ever attended, which was good because Boot and Glenn were both so nervous they couldn't have handled any more. Glenn seems very nice and really cares about Boot.

Highway 400 to Toronto and back to Sharon's. Her house, lovely though it is, verges on being a madhouse with floral wallpaper careening down every wall, each room a different pattern. Every single light-switch plate bears a floral or bird design. She cross-stitches patterns that look like her budgies. The house is a puzzle box with no apparent entrance and it locks on the inside, which drives me mad. It is a lovely house with all its character and charms on the inside, but it has a fortress quality to it. Now that Bill has moved out, the house has reverted to being a shrine to Ernie. Sharon refers to Ernie as "the love of my life."

Sept. 12

To Kingston. I did the driving honours along Lakeshore from Oshawa, past Cobourg and on to Highway 2. Cobourg has swelled beyond recognition. A radio station played '80s music and I finally felt the wave of nostalgia I had expected. Rolling fields cut by ravines running to the water. Fringes of woods, towns with gazebos, everything called "Loyalist." An antique store on every corner of every main street. Took the ferry just outside Picton. Water! Reached Marsha and John's new house. Red brick house, the kind kids draw. It looks and feels like their old house, only more spacious.

All not quite right with Marsha, John and Martin. Martin is four years-old, all Smith, a skinny, long-limbed, expressive boy. Both Marsha and John seemed tense. Marsha works mornings at Hôtel Dieu as chaplain for people with mental issues. She's also doing a lot of workshops; anger management, life skills, etc. She and John are often divided over how to deal with Martin. Sometimes she is harsh with him and sometimes John takes over as disciplinarian. But when John does take control, Marsha often denigrates him. She seems to be turning into a verbal sniper. As usual she has taken on too much and the backlash is coming out in verbal jibes.

Fred and I gave them some space and had a great time roaming around Queen's campus. Students lined up at the bookstore. Another year, another term, as unchanging as the seasons. We roamed through Mac Corry, read the cartoons etc on grad student office doors. We entered Vic Hall and wandered past my old room, 514D. Vic Hall has become coed and I was startled to see young men lounging on beds in these rooms.

Well-deep lecture rooms of Jeffrey Hall and finally the *Queen's Journal* office, now on Earl Street. Fred was photo editor for *the Journal* and was especially interested in seeing the place. We visited the photo basement and Fred met this year's photo editor. Fred recognized a cracked maroon vinyl couch from his days there. Negative scraps on the cutting room floor, coffee cups and fast food debris. Fun.

Fred went on to Montréal while I stayed a few extra days in Kingston. Marsha, John, Marilyn, Matthew, Karen and I went to see a play, *the Attic, the Pearls and Three Fine Girls* in Gananoque. It was partially written by Anne-Marie Macdonald (*Fall On Your Knees*) and concerned a fraught relationship between three siblings. Cruelties, family secrets and a lost mother – you could never accuse Macdonald of being a minimalist.

Marsha now permanently wearing a wig. I admit I prefer the old scarves. They seemed to bring out the luminous power of her eyes the way the wigs don't. She is doing a lot of work with outpatients and her work days are filled with people with manic-depression, detox and eating disorders. So different from the sterility of my work days.

Sept. 17

Day trip to Smith's Fall to visit Gerry Lafontaine. Marsha lent me her car and I sailed up Highway 15 past rocks, maples, farmhouses, gas stations, junk shops, the Rideau Canal. Old songs on the radio. I met Gerry and his new friend Ruth at Tim Horton's. He looked older of course but he was the same interesting witty man I remembered from the Windsor Station days. We spent a mellow afternoon poling through junk shops, talking about writing, relationships, the department. He has been a mentor to me through all the ups and downs of CP. He knows the joy of crafting a perfect paragraph or sentence or line of copy, how utterly engrossing it is.

Over lunch in Perth I told him how low the pettiness at work had sunk me, how I feel I have no purpose and don't even know who I am any more. He was sympathetic and helpful. He was upset to hear of Ken Smith's retirement and said CP was always an anomaly, close to government and traditionally full of eccentrics. Gerry also deplores the purging of eccentricity at the railway and we hoked over how I may be the last of the great eccentrics hired by the Old Railway. My job lineage being Carol Lacourte and Ralph Wilson, both with an Old Railway approach to hiring and doing business.

It was good to see him still so interested in the world around him, his journalist's eye keen as ever. He also told me to consider how Calgary is strengthening my work. "Whatever you may feel about Calgary, the company or the department, your work has never been stronger. Just something for you to consider."

After returning to Kingston. Marsha and I, both avid Hitchcock fans, spent the evening watching *Rear Window*.

Sept. 18

Good talk with Marsha about Fred. She doesn't think he's behaving like himself at all. She joked about how thrilled John would be is she suddenly vaulted ahead of him and became the major breadwinner. She sees Fred and me as becoming polarized; he's rebelling against me by becoming more controlling, domineering and that's the only way he can hold on to his identity as I gain strength every day. I think I understand where he's at and believe I'm being as patient as I can but I am not going to capitulate though.

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Arrived in Montréal around 6:30. Found my hideaway, 2093 St-Urbain, “La Révolution” B&B. Everything I imagined. A narrow stone building dating back to 1830. Three flights of wooden stairs up to my garret room at the top. Even better than the Mad Hatters in Amsterdam. Soft oiled pine floors, crooked beams. Christian has decorated the walls with posters of old movies. Revelled in my little room for a while then headed down St-Laurent.

Weathercocks, block long stone edifices divided into duplexes, triplexes. Spiral staircases, balconies, terrasses. More people, more energy, more motion on this one street than in the entire city of Calgary on a Saturday night. Everyone is out, people like me, boulevardiers, small children with their grandparents, students. Bills posted, graffiti. Kevorkian Death Cycle playing at les Foufounes Électrique.

Restaurant after restaurant, each more enticing than the next, and all beckoning to another new world. Southeastern/Santa Fe style décor here too, but so much variety. Should I go 60s retro, haute culture, space age? I could wander into le Café Gypsy with its dark wood, red velours and Tarot cards on the windows, or I could slink, striped and suspect into le Film Noir. I eventually opted for nostalgia and had dinner and red wine at Bar St-Laurent, where I wondered what happened to Ruth Taylor, Graham Chartier and so many of my Concordia fellow travellers.

Tears streamed down my cheeks as I passed Warshaw, l’Androgyne, the soft wooden balconies, crooked door jambs rubbed by the elements, the turreted roofs, because the air is sultry, because it is home and my heart has opened after being spellbound for three years and I feel like myself again, full of feeling, yearning, hopes, fears, desire. This is where I belong, I miss it so much and I never wanted to leave in the first place. And then back up the twisty stairs to my garret where I lay in bed looking up at the skylight listening to the din of traffic on St-Urbain at midnight. This is my Safe House. No CPR. I am in the Artists’ Protection Program.

Sept. 19

Breakfast at the large round table. Coffee, fresh croissants, scrambled eggs, served by a lovely young Lebanese woman who loves Calgary. She works with Christian four hours a day and is planning to go into Hotel Management. Met a couple from Toronto who were on their way to Vermont and NYC. They love Montréal and think the drivers here are better than the ones in Toronto. The city goes to bed and wakes up late. Most places were rolling up the grills and setting up the terrasses long after ten am. On the corner of St-Urbain near la Révolution is a dilapidated atelier. The men inside look like grizzled old seamen. They actually make violins.

A man has turned his bicycle into a rickshaw using a huge dream-catcher as a back canopy. He cruises up and down Prince-Arthur ringing his bell, hoping someone will pay for a ride. Street corner tattooists, jaywalkers, rollerbladers, unicyclists, buskers, smokers, wine drinkers. Above all, students, writers, artists. I love this quarter of the city. « Crêpe farce. Oeuf/tomate. Bacon/oeuf/tomate/fromage/ratatouille » Roof gardens. Prince-Arthur cobblestones, sloped awnings, wrought-iron fences, grilled windows. Ruelles sluice through the city like secret passageways. « Antiquités. Escomptes. Rabais. Au coin de la rue » Boutiques full of expensive retro-hippie clothes. Back on Prince-Arthur and the bicycle calèche with the dream-catcher comes around again, this time with a passenger.

Windsor Station concourse was solemn, white with cherry wood, as if it had never known the rabble of passengers, travellers, tourists, vagabonds. Elegant but looks like a museum without exhibits, and so sterile considering it was the transcontinental railway station. However the black coffee statue of Lord Mount Stephen still lurks in the shadows. The angel still bears the serviceman to heaven. The Canadian barbershop is also still here. And there is now a Café Viennoise. It's a place for state pageants as opposed to carnivals. I ran into Rob Parent from Translation Services. He was recently in Calgary, visiting Dave Jones and thought my desk looked suspiciously clean.

From there I meandered down to Vieux-Montréal. Gold lamé Elvis has attracted quite a crowd. A woman roams the terrasses singing to people for money. She's polite, though, asks « Tu-veux un chanson? » / "Do you want a song?" Fading print on old brick. "Buy Union Stamp Shoes. They Cost No More." Overheard on the Métro: "I've got the BMW, Bus-Métro-Walk." Pigeons mass in the windows of a sunken stone building. An épicerie with a Hebrew sign is observing "Kashruth." « Il est plus tard que tu ne crois » Wistful song from the mid-80s playing in a boutique: "Don't sell out the dreams that you should be keeping."

Corporate advertising in the Concordia University washroom cubicles covered with responses: « Laissez-nous de pissoire » « À bat le mercantilisme » « Pisser en paix ! » « Pas de corporative dans l'université ». Conversation between two students on the Métro:

« Solitaire ? »

« Naturellement. Quoi de neuf, plus ça change, yadda yadda yadda »

Sept. 20

Met Gail Veli for lunch. Joyful quacks of reunion, big hugs. Her last three years have been even more fraught than mine. Ravil on the job search, grunt work in an auto plant in Cambridge until finally getting a decent librarian position in Washington, DC. Now accepting a position in Plattsburg. Gail has spent the entire time commuting, visiting Ravil in DC, accompanying him to ALA conferences in places like New Orleans. She said we (she and I) have lived different lives but are so similar in other ways. She relates to me in ways she can't to others. We joked and I laughed and laughed until it hurt. Only with Gail can I do that. I spent the night with her. We had barbecue chicken and real Montréal bagels, Liberty cream cheese. Met Stephanie, Ryan's partner, and their two small daughters. Gail is a grandmother!

Sept. 21

Continued my Memory Lane tour. Le Cours de Montréal felt so very familiar. The “blind” Vietnam vet is still working Guy Métro and the barrel-chested man is still singing in Peel Métro. I ended up walking down de Maisonneuve in step with the Asian woman with the Noh mask makeup, who still dresses for success and goes to the Faubourg to read the business section of the Gazette. I even saw the grouchy old man who used to hoard the newspapers at Howard Ross Library. All of these familiar city people.

Went to NDG on the 102 and 105 buses. Somerled, King Edward, Côte-St-Antoine. To get into the spirit of my vagabondage I picked up the most recent Gail Scott book about Paris. I was dismayed by how much I disliked it. It seems to me she’s stuck in the 1980s, still sees the French as “exotic others.” A lot of her description seems very judgmental and bourgeoisie while trying to claim feminism. She sounded like Mary Helen’s respectable mother. I don’t understand how someone who lives and works in a French milieu still sees the way she does.

Dinner at the Chalet in NDG. It is a Swiss-style barbecue chicken place but is not part of the chain of Swiss Chalets. The same servers were still there and they were warm and kind to me, told me to take my time. Conversation about the ice storm. I didn’t detect much damage on my ramblings.

Continued through NDG into Westmount. Fred’s apartment, Westmount Park. Had to sit for a while. What it was like, what it was like knowing I was moving to Calgary, it was too late to turn back, realizing Fred didn’t care, didn’t want me in the apartment. Thought about Gail Scott’s book some more. Nothing in it about earning a living, lay-offs, manual labour and bosses, public service, rude people in both languages. What about the biker gangs in the east end, the heat-baked apartments on Tillemont, the mafia bars, “les gars” who do not have angular cheekbones or cross their legs or are any more committed to hygiene than anyone else in the world. What about the referendum? Her book seems so irrelevant to me. Found a great place to hang out, drink wine and write in my notebook. Le Restaurant York in Westmount Square.

Sept. 22

Met Gail at Howard Ross and spent two nights with her. Her small flat is stacked to the ceiling with books, Christmas ornaments, crafts, toys for her new grandchildren. All saved in case she can ever afford a house or John and Ryan move out. Ryan and Stephanie are living in the back bedroom with their two babies. Gail is thrilled at being a grandmother. We watched Masterpiece Theatre's *House of Cards*, in which Ian Stephenson played a delightfully Machiavellian Francis Urquhart. Gail and I repeated and savoured some of his best lines.

McGill is exactly the same; the same people doing the same things as when I left it. The same insecurity, petty jealousy, lack of support for any kind of personal development. Gail took some computer courses and all she received from Howard Ross management was resentment. When she tried to show Jane how to do something on the computer, Jane stuck her face right into Gail's and said, "I am intelligent you know." A little insecurity there I'd say. I still can't help wondering what would have happened if I had bailed out of CPR and took Theo's term position at McGill. Would I be a permanent employee now? I would never have had to leave Montréal.

Time to leave Gail's haven. Left hearing Gail play the Jungle Book for her grandchildren/ Baloo was singing "the bare necessities, the simple bare necessities ..." I joked with Gail that it was time to return to the "man-village.

Hopped on the 191 at Lionel-Groulx and wound through St-Henri, past the pawn shops, « Comptants » Dollarama stores. Treeless, construction abysses, flea market antiquités, public housing, bicycles laden with beer. The bus continued into Lachine, the housing built around the Dominion Bridge gradually morphing from blue collar to middle class at Provost. Passed our old Lachine apartment and the waterfront park. Walked through downtown Pointe Claire until I found a Van Houtte café/bistro where I whiled away the time writing, drinking beer. A great hang-out. Three management students behind me plotting job hunt strategy. "What about CP? That's big," said one of the students. "Cut-backs, they're nickling and diming. Maybe something in operations management," said another student. Half an hour later I heard this from the restaurant section: "CN's the best. CP is nothing now." (CN's head office has remained in Montréal.)

Left at about 9:30. Waited at the 191 stop. The whole area looked deserted. Streetlights concealed in foliage, drowsing houses. Unlike Calgary, I knew I wouldn't be stranded and a bus would soon be along and I could savour the feeling of being a vagabond with my bags over my shoulder. Dark, dreamy ride back through Lachine, St-Henri to Lionel-Groulx. Back up the creaky stairs to my little room sequestered in the heart of the city.

Sept. 25

Morning in the Croissant de lune with a bowl of café-au-lait, enjoying the French-jazz music, stone walls, photography exhibition. They played Edith Piaf, "Je ne regrette rien." Stairways, enclosures, passages, caves, hideaways, holds, the interior life of this city. Passersby framed in ruelles, foliage. Inside/outside. Ad on a bus shelter: « Le Boss est parti? Dansez. » Dylan's greatest at Bar St-Laurent. "Omen" images all over the city. My holiday has ended and I will soon meet Fred, begin the long, hard return to Calgary.

Oct. 24

Connie and Andy (Fred's balloonist friends) bought property just outside Standard (Alberta). Fred and I drove out on Sunday to visit them. This is prairie country, southeast Calgary, perfect for hot air ballooning. Right now people are renting the house so Connie and Andy are camping in a trailer. They set up a quonset hangar where they eat, and feed people who help them out as balloon crews or clearing the caraganas and dead poplars. A rusted Chevrolet from the early '60s lurks behind the hangar. A long time ago someone asked the previous owners if he could leave the car there for the afternoon. He never returned and the car has sat there for thirty years. The ground has grown up around it.

I learned that the level of ground depends on where the wind blows. Soil collects on selected patches that are protected from the wind, causing the earth to build up. So all that land that looks so fluid from a distance is really uneven, unpredictable, depending on wind patterns.

The house was bought from Eaton's catalogue, a kit house that told you how to assemble the walls. Slot A into Slot B, etc. The family built an addition to the structure and raised four children in the kit house. The view is amazing, shadows rippling across muted amber fields, small collection of buildings. Real life inside a landscape that still fascinates/frightens me with its vastness. We helped Connie and Andy clear brush and remove trees and I rode with Connie on the tractor. It gave me a sense of what it could be like to live out here. They treated us to dinner at the Little Village Café in Strathmore.

Dec. 9

Fun trip to Lethbridge to ride a locomotive and write a CPR News story on the world's largest and highest steel trestle bridge, which is celebrating its 90th anniversary. Drove down with Darren Paquin, a new hire in the corporate communications department. We arrived at the marshalling yards at Kipp. Craig Lencucha, operations coordinator and Kevin Bishop, road manager, generously set it up so we could ride the locomotive. They also took us for lunch and showed us the city.

Lethbridge is known as "gathering territory," which means it's customer-based rather than run-through. The city is a centre for grain, potash and coal and has an extensive mechanical shop and 125 Running Trades. There's an average of forty-four trains in and out of Lethbridge every day. Bishop and "Cooch" drove us to the Cargill elevators east of the city where we met locomotive engineer Doug Hegland and conductor Ken Florence. Doug has twenty-two years at CPR. "My" train was carrying grain to Coutts, on the Manitoba border.

There's a kettle perched on a hot plate in the cab of Locomotive No 8572. Although eight computers control the cab the instrument panels don't look frightening. I could figure them out. A square yellow button sounds the horn. Hegland is burly, ruddy-checked with a greying ponytail. He was wearing a Harley Davidson shirt under his jacket. He operated the levers while Florence radioed the yard. I interviewed them for *the CPR News*. They both had a lot to say about railroading and are, of course, bitter about cutbacks.

- “Lethbridge is a coal town, the whole area is riddled with abandoned mines.”
- “The best part of the job is every trip is different, we’re always seeing different things. Wildlife. We see a lot of things people don’t see driving down the road. We saw an owl get nailed by a hawk.”
- “I hate killing an animal. Basically, people are idiots. I’ve had people run into me while standing still. Lately we’ve been hitting a lot of semis. We’ve had four runaways in twenty-two years. Lot of train wrecks because of broken rails.”
- “The biggest challenge can simply be not knowing when you’ll get called into work. It could be at 2300 hours. I sit by the phone and wait, still not sure if I’ll be called in to work. Same as fifteen years ago. ”
- “This is a pretty easy grade through the coulee, it’s the second highest seniority subdivision.”
- “So many different things can happen. Close calls are more frightening than actually hitting someone. If we hit a gas truck do we call emergency, put it in Throttle *? We only call emergency if we hit something. If we called every time we had a close call, like we’re supposed to now, we’d be in emergency all day.”
- “We used to cover for each other. Now it’s each man for himself, we watch our own backs. There was a lot more unity in the past. When people are cut you are also cutting loyalty, unity and expertise. I’m simply having to do too many jobs.”
- “Once I ran a switch and the conductor had to fill in the paperwork. Well *he* got in trouble for filling the paperwork wrong.”
- “You’ve really got to be in control of the train here. The road is designed for cars. It’s hard to see the switch with all the lights and green signs. And there’s also the curve in the road that’s like an optical illusion.”
- “It was more fun fifteen years ago. More guys to catch each other’s mistakes. Not nearly as many old drunks hired as there were in the ‘50s. We used to round up a crew of men in from the legion. Old adage, ‘As long as nothing happens.’”
- “Best improvement in fifteen years is replacing the old order forms with clearances. The clearances give you direct contact with dispatchers. Before you sometimes had to sit and wait seven hours for another order.”

– “We’ve had some pretty bad accidents. The conductor says, ‘Oh there’s an arm, there’s a leg. Yet it’ll be a carman, someone who checks the wheels who’ll go off on stress leave. We’re the ones who have to go out and look at it.”

– “People, truckers are always flashing at us at crossings, ‘Dim your lights, dim your lights.’ We have to have our brights at crossings. Imagine the furor if we hit someone.”

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Conductor Ken Florence warned me, “Whatever you do, just don’t look down.” Locomotive 8572 paused midway across the Lethbridge Viaduct and I shinned down the steep steps of the cab, to take in the view. It was breath-taking. All around me were coulees, snow-glazed hills studded with coal shafts. It was like standing in a Chinese painting, suspended between heaven and earth – only buffeted by gale-force winds. Then I did it – looked down. The track lies 314 feet over the Oldman River. I couldn’t do justice to the occasion though, as I only wanted to climb back into the cab.

The viaduct was conceived in 1906 to shorten the distance between Lethbridge and Fort McLeod. I’ve seen it in old photos, coming together and taking shape like a giant Meccano set. Steelworkers were summoned from other countries to work on the bridge. I had no trouble imagining the labour it took, or what it must have been like working on the bridge in the windy cold. Finally, on Nov. 3, 1909, the first trains streaked along the mile-long Lethbridge Viaduct on the Crow’s Nest Past. At ninety years old it is still the pride of Lethbridge. It has many names; High River Bridge, the Viaduct or the CPR Bridge. “It’s our bridge,” said Doug Hegland. “Every time you see a logo for Lethbridge it’s got that bridge on it.”

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Long meeting of the Communications and Public Affairs department, followed by a dinner. Paul Clark unveiled a new organization chart. Most people are either upset by it or don't understand exactly what it means. Debbie-Lyne, Ian, Jennifer, Mary Helen and I congregated at the Capital after the dinner. We were especially upset over the way Clark and his minions are picking on Rick Robinson. They don't understand what he does as corporate photographer and felt he did a poor job with the Holiday Train. They are also questioning John Timmins's value to the company. They've also downgraded the Graphics department to being the "technical branch" of the Communications unit. Right now I feel as if I have ruined my entire life coming out here with this terrible company.

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